Reflections
01/15/12

It has been my privilege to be the pastor of this church during a remarkable period in its long and distinguished history. As Fourth Presbyterian Church is poised to begin an exciting new chapter, it looks forward to the completion later this year and opening of a handsome, new five story building, the Gratz Center, immediately behind this 1914 masterpiece.

The new five story building will house a spacious Commons that will facilitate coffee hour, receptions and ease the traffic congestion that happens every Sunday morning. There will be a new day school with adjacent, outdoor play area, dining room and kitchen. Center for Life and Learning Lounge, a chapel, multiple-purpose room and twenty two classrooms for our growing Sunday School, Tutoring program and meetings.

You have responded generously to a Capital Funds Campaign, launched in the midst of a difficult economy – and, happily, we have the money and pledges to pay for the building.

There were other components of P2C – a gift to the PC(USA) Hearts and Hands Mission and NCD Fund, a new sanctuary roof, and rebuilding our precious Aeolian Skinner Pipe Organ.

Church officers deferred those items in order to complete the building. The gift to PC(USA) will be addressed in another way; engineers have assured us that the roof will hold out for another five years or so… and, frankly, we didn't know what to do about the organ. Meanwhile the organ continues to deteriorate. There are serious mechanical problems resulting in challenges that only the most skilled organists can work around. Notes sound when they are not supposed to sound, and fail to sound when they should. The console – the brains of the instrument is seriously out of date – and the pipes – in three locations need to be upgraded.

And just when we were out of ideas and options and people who know and understand our pipe organ began to really worry – a wonderful thing happened. The Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust, one of the church's longest standing and most generous benefactors, and very generous supporter of the arts in Chicago, offered a one million dollar matching grant as a springboard to financing the organ project – which will cost three

million. The Trust will contribute one dollar for every two dollars the church raises – to bring the project to a successful conclusion.

And so we are launching this morning the campaign to rebuild the Aeolian Skinner Pipe Organ of Fourth Presbyterian Church. There is more information in the bulletin and you are invited to visit the website for fascinating information about the organ and the rebuilding project.

This is the third million dollar grant from the Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust in recent years. Our relationship began with the late Richard Genius, a Fourth Presbyterian Church member and son of Elizabeth Morse. And I am pleased to welcome to worship and, on your behalf, to thank James Alexander – the co-trustee of the Morse Charitable Trust. Jim is a great friend of Fourth Church and of mine, and we are grateful to him.

It is not possible to overstate the importance of music in the life of Fourth Presbyterian Church. The choirs, Tower Brass, and the organ add enormously to our weekly worship, our celebration of the great days in the church year, our observance of weddings and memorial services. It is not exaggeration to say that church music of all styles and variations, is presented here with more expertise, elegance, power and sheer beauty than any other place I know. And it has been my joy, for twenty six years to be its beneficiary.

My earliest experiences of the holy, the mystery of God, if you will, are associated with music – the hymns of the church, but also great classical music. And over the years of professional ministry, it has been music, the music of organ and choir that has continued to convey the mystery of God for me.

The very first time I stepped into this sanctuary I was here to be interviewed – it was a bitterly cold January evening in 1985 – the organ was playing. Dr. Morgan Simmons was practicing. I've always loved organ music and then Morgan modulated into my favorite hymn, "Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty" and let out all the stops. I would have signed on right there, on the spot. I learned later that it was a well rehearsed plan, which I assume they pulled off for every candidate, but it certainly worked for me!

We are blessed with great music, our elegant Morning Choir that leads us into the presence of God every Sunday. The Chancel and Youth and

Children's Choir. Tower Brass and the best music staff in the world led by Organist/Choir Director John Sherer: Thom Gouwens, Associate: and Katie Sinclair, Youth and Children. And before them, Morgan and Mary Simmons.

And the heart of it – the instrument – the matchless pipe organ built for this space by the Aeolian Skinner Organ Company.

When rebuilding, which will take from twelve to eighteen months to complete, it will become again what it used to be, but is no longer – the finest pipe organ in Chicago.

So, in gratitude to the Elizabeth Morse Charitable trust for seeing this need and helping us to meet it, I commend this great project to you.

And, I cannot wait, when Sue and I return to worship and become part of the worshipping congregation to hear the magnificent results.